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SUBJECT: IRAQI ARMY CONFRONTS MEK AT CAMP ASHRAF

REF: A. 08 BAGHDAD 2658

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 553

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Although tensions have escalated at the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) Camp Ashraf in Iraq, press reports may exaggerate the situation on the ground. After failure to resolve a three-week long discussion, Iraqi Army (IA) elements at Camp Ashraf moved to seize control of a building on the edge of the camp on March 13. Approximately 100 Camp Ashraf Residents (CAR) created a human shield to thwart the takeover. Although a confrontation continues and the GOI reportedly plans to arrest the demonstrators if they do not disperse and allow the IA forces to take control of the building, no violence has occurred. The move results from increased GOI frustration at activities by MEK in Iraq and its inability to find a quick solution to the issue of the continued presence of the MEK in Iraq and, notably, is taking place while the Prime Minister is out of the country. SEPTTEL will address steps the Department may consider in response to this situation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) For the past three weeks, the GOI and MEK at Camp Ashraf have been trying to resolve how to set up space to conduct a GOI survey of all the residents of the Camp. The MEK provided trailers for the survey, but the GOI wanted a building in which the survey workers could reside as well as work. The MEK previously offered an unoccupied building on the periphery of the city of Ashraf, but within the confines of the camp, called the Lord Slynn Building, twice to the GOI for use by the GOI Ashraf Committee while at Camp Ashraf and for family visits. The Committee wants to use this building for the surveys and demanded sole access but the Camp Ashraf leaders refused. IA battalion (BN) elements providing security for Camp Ashraf, home to approximately 3400 MEK members, first attempted to take control of the Lord Slynn Building during the evening of March 13.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The entrance to the building, which is now occupied by an unknown number of female residents, has been blocked by an estimated 100 CAR forming a human shield. Even though the IA BN could easily have overreacted to the situation, their actions thus far have shown their efforts to adhere to the spirit of their assurances of humane treatment. Even though, the GOI has presented an ultimatum to the demonstrators to either vacate the premises or be arrested. Although the protesters have refused, the IA BN has yet to proceed with any arrests. The GOI Committee insists that the building was built by the IA prior to 2003 and that the GOI has every right to take possession of it. Camp Ashraf leaders refute these claims and contend that the MEK paid for and constructed the building, and, therefore, should have sole use.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The U.S. Military Police (MP) BN located at an

adjacent Forward Operating Base - FOB Grizzly - continues to monitor the situation for any actions that could be seen as violations of the humane treatment assurances provided by the GOI to the USG (REF A). Although the Camp Ashraf leaders contend that one resident had been handcuffed and another beaten with a baton, the MP BN reports no such incident took place, as far as its personnel can tell. Reports suggesting an individual outside the camp, likely a vendor seeking to deliver goods to the camp, had been hit with a taser "20 times" by an IA soldier during the morning of March 15 were determined to be unsubstantiated by the MP BN.

15. (SBU) Initial press statements emanating from the MEK's umbrella organization based in Paris, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, have exaggerated the situation. One statement noted that "Iraqi forces have stormed Camp Ashraf." These statements are likely to be picked up by international press outlets without verification of their veracity.

16. (SBU) Comment: The GOI is increasingly frustrated at the slow pace of its efforts to find a solution to the problem of the presence of 3400 Iranians it does not want on its territory. It also is focused on perceived anti-government activities by the MEK from within the camp. We will continue to monitor for any violation of the GOI's humane treatment assurances and press the GOI to honor its commitments. Given the increased pressure on the MEK by the GOI, SEPTTEL will address building on the posture laid out in REF B.
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